## News From the Wyoming Department of Health

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## **Department of Health Warns of Unexpected Lead Dangers**

Wyoming Department of Health officials are asking parents to be aware of the dangers to children posed by items that may unexpectedly contain lead.

Lead is a naturally occurring bluish-gray metal found in small amounts in the earth's crust. "While you might not expect it, lead can also be found in items brought into the home such as candy, folk and traditional medications, ceramic dinnerware and metallic toys and trinkets," said David Barber, environmental epidemiologist for the Wyoming Department of Health.

Last month, Reebok International Ltd recalled 300,000 heart-shaped charm bracelets that had been provided as a free gift with shoe purchases. A Minnesota child died from acute lead poisoning after swallowing one of the charms, which contained lead.

"Infants and children are especially vulnerable to lead poisoning," said Steve Melia, lead and radon program coordinator for the department. A child who swallows large amounts of lead may develop blood anemia, severe stomachache, muscle weakness and brain damage. Lead can affect a child's mental and physical growth even at low levels of exposure.

"While the United States has strong safety standards in place regarding lead, many lead-contaminated consumer products, including items manufactured for use by children, are produced in countries with very limited government regulation," Melia said.

"Parents should notice where the objects their children are handling are coming from and should not allow children to put any metal objects into their mouths," Melia continued. "Checking the country of origin and contents of suspect items and frequent hand washing can help protect your health and your child's health."

Barber continued, "Environmental exposure to lead can happen from breathing workplace air or dust, eating lead-contaminated foods or drinking lead-contaminated water. Infants and children have typically been exposed by eating lead-based paint chips, chewing on objects painted with lead-based paint or swallowing house dust or soil that contains lead."

"In the United States, widespread education about lead paint dangers and purposeful reduction of lead hazards in housing has been effective," Barber said. "But lead is still a threat and ingestion of lead-containing items is a source of life-threatening blood lead levels that should not be ignored."

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